DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 183 EA 011 461

AUTHOR Lynch, James J.
TITLE A Primer on a Current Trend. The Middle School.
PUB DATE [79]
NOTE 14p.; Not available in paper copy due to marginal legibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Educational History; Educational Philosophy; Intermediate Grades; *Middle Schools; Program Development; Teacher Education Curriculum

ABSTRACT

This paper traces the historical development of the middle school from its beginnings in 1893. It presents philosophical background for the middle school concept and compares middle schools and junior high schools. Psychological theories underlying the middle school are discussed, including the theory of the period of "transescence" between childhood and adolescence. Practical considerations involved in instituting a middle school are listed, beginning with initial decisions about objective-setting, grade span, public relations, staff selection, curriculum, facilities, and long-range planning. The need for special teacher training is stressed. Guiding principles for a middle school regarding grading, student involvement in decision-making, learning objectives, encouragement of creativity and diversity, and interdisciplinary experiences are offered. A need is recognized for functional models for middle school programs, organizations to aid planners, and research yielding insights into local needs for a middle school program. (JM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED168183

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

JAMES J. LYNCH
COORDINATOR
CONTINUING EDUCATION
BENSALEM HIGH SCHOOL
CORNWELLS HEIGHTS, PA 19020

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A Primer on a Current Trend

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Lynch

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

EA 011 461

J Lynch

A Primer on a Current Trend

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

By showing the historical development, the concept of the middle school and how it has grown, along with other psychological aspects of the involved age group, it is hoped that educators, school board members and parents will gain a greater insight into the "whole" middle school. This will then allow them to answer the question "Is the Middle School Philosophy for us?".

In the early nineteen hundreds, the 8-4 grade system was judged not able to meet certain educational demands entrusted to it by society. These dissatisfactions led to a reorganization movement in the upper elementary and secondary education.

The factors leading to this decision for reorganization were the following:

1. Lack of implementation of the early findings of adolescent psychology.
2. Economic and program deficiencies of small and isolated grammer schools.
3. Elimination of pupils at the end of the eighth grade.
4. Elementary teaching methods too long continued and too sudenly changed.

5. Inadequate provision for personal, social, educational, and vocational guidance in the elementary school and high school.

Charles W. Elliot initiated the middle school concept with the formation of a Committee of Ten in 1893. The various committees serving from 1892 to 1918, stressed the rationale that contributed to the concept of the junior high school. They felt the need for better provisions in the school program for the needs of adolescents. They also felt a need for greater pupil exploration, individualized instruction, and a better articulation between elementary and secondary education.

The existing junior high school structure had many negative characteristics, some being:

1. Lack of special training needed for successful junior high school teaching.
2. Little attention given to certification requirements for this level.
3. Junior high school and its teachers lacking prestige, i.e., a Junior high teaching assignment is no more than a stepping stone to a Senior high position.
4. A Junior high school too often inherits a rundown or outgrown Senior high building.

Donald Eichhorn, in 1969, suggested that what is clearly needed is the creative development of programs for the

"transescent",(the period of not being a child or an adolescent). Middle school leaders have attacked former programs for this age, such as departmentalization, high school type schedules,inflexible student groupings, improper guidance approaches,boy-girl dances, interscholastic athletics, and staffing comprised of secondary school teachers. In many instances this has left a situation in which many programs are either barren or nonexistent; or in other cases, simply a reversion to former activities. There does not appear to be any widespread movement to create new programs designed for the obvious needs and characteristics of the "transescent".

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

The term middle school is used freely to describe various grade combinations: 5-8, 6-8, 4-7, and even those traditionally assigned to junior high school, 7-9 or 6-9.

Many educators believe that the concept of the middle school is not dependent upon grade combinations, but is really a completely new approach to the education of young people between the primary and high school years. "It is the focus and the spirit of the operation that is the important factor",states Mildred T. Wilson,Principal of the Conwell Middle School in Philadelphia.

One theory of a middle school is that the early years of schooling should be devoted to making the tools of living

and learning familiar to the student. In the later school years he needs to gain the specialized and basic knowledge vital to his career and whole adult life.

It is in the middle school years that the experiences must be uniquely and individually tailored to each individual so that the tools may become the skills he needs in order to realize his full potential. The fifth year is none too early for these experiences to begin. Young people in these "in-between" years are very different from other age groups and also differ from each other to a greater degree than any other group. In this stage of development erratic physical and emotional growth are usually present and have definite effects on learning. The middle school concept is to provide an educational program focused on these special needs and interests of the pre- and early adolescent.

DEVELOPING A MIDDLE SCHOOL

When a school district is thinking of developing a middle school, there are many practical considerations, some are:

1. Creating a good public opinion on the middle school idea.
2. Determining an appropriate grade span.
3. Pinpointing objectives of the middle school.
4. Obtaining appropriately trained teachers.
5. Selecting relevant learning opportunities.

6. Weighing alternative curriculum designs.
7. Developing strategies for instruction.
8. Designing adequate school plants and facilities.
9. Initiating long-range planning for transition to the middle school.

A span of at least three grades to allow for the gradual transition from elementary to high school is extremely important. An emerging departmental structure in each succeeding grade to effect a gradual transition from the self-contained classroom concept to the totally departmentalized high school is also important. There must be flexible approaches to education, such as team teaching, flexible block scheduling, individualized instruction, independent study, individual tutorial programs, employing methods to stimulate children to learn how to learn, and required special courses to be taught in departmentalized form. Interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary approaches should also be used, such as unified arts, performing arts, exploratory arts, a guidance department specially oriented to fill the needs of this age group, an equitable number of faculty with both elementary and secondary certification, (some with each type), and a limited attention to interschool sports and social events.

The individual school district must be aware that this type of school costs a large amount of money. Many districts would consider this financial commitment a constrait

in the development of their middle school. Middle schools should be kept fairly small so as to enable flexibility in scheduling and use of the actual physical plant. Again, because of the size of some districts, these too may be considered constraints. There is indeed a lack of specialized teacher preparation; and a lack of precedent to guide program development may also deter some districts from trying the true middle school idea.

RATIONALE FOR A MIDDLE SCHOOL

The onset of adolescence over the years has shifted downward because of changed climate, improved diet, and sharply modified social relations. Opponents of the middle school concept suggest that the junior high school seldom succeeds in offering the special kind of education young adolescents need. The junior high schools, philosophically speaking, exist to satisfy the needs of early adolescents, but they, (the administration), only reflect the high school with the minute calculating of grade-point averages. The middle school relies on dedicated staff to serve the needs of their students, and specially trained teachers are vital to its success. Traditionally, most junior high school teachers are prepared in colleges for high school teaching, and are ineffective in teaching the young adolescent because of this training.

The undergraduate preparation of middle school teachers should reflect what is known about the developmental stage known as "transescence". Speaking in terms of the traditional junior high school is the fact that they, for the most part, represent just that, "a junior high school", emulating the pressures and demands of the senior high school.

Colleges need to teach more about the stages of "transescence". Although it is generally recognized that it is an extremely difficult age to live with and teach, little information, comparatively, has been produced to aid teachersto a better understanding. If middle school teaching is to develop into an exciting, creative activity, such items as the following should be included as the guiding principles of such a class:

1. All letter or number grades as a means of final evaluation should be eliminated. A grade of "P" (pass), with a written evaluation of their growth would be much better. Students who have performed unsatisfactorilly should receive no record of having taken the course. The elimination of grades is necessary for the creation of a nonthreatening learning environment and an honest and dignified relationship between student and instructor.
2. A democratic classroom should be established in which students are treated with the dignity and respect which should be accorded all human beings.

3. Students need to be involved in deciding what should be studied and how it should be studied. The teachers should work with students in developing goals and procedures that are meaningful to them. This process of student involvement should result in the student learning because of intrinsic motivation.
4. Students must learn how to think, how to investigate, and how to solve problems.
5. Students must be encouraged to think innovatively and creatively. Diversity should be encouraged and new ideas should be readily accepted for testing. The classroom should become a place where demonstrations can be executed, research plans originated, learning materials produced, discoveries shared, values developed, and humanism expanded.
6. Students should be involved in many experiences which require skills in many disciplines.
7. Students in methods courses need to ask themselves "Why?" for each act of teaching in the middle school.

THE PLACE OF THE NINTH GRADER

How does the ninth grader benefit by being a freshman in a senior high school rather than a senior in the junior high school? Rumerantz suggests that a middle school without the

ninth grader will have fewer discipline problems than it would have if they were in the school. These students are larger physically, in some cases they are retrainees, and in most cases, too sophisticated for the incoming seventh graders. Socially, they belong with young ladies and gentlemen more nearly their own age who may act as strong influences to keep them productively engaged in school activities. With the rapid rate of physical, social, and emotional growth of children, there is much more of a similarity between sixth graders and eighth graders than between seventh graders and ninth graders.

HOW SHOULD THE MIDDLE SCHOOL MOVEMENT PROCEED

Strategies and approaches that attempt to deal with the development of programs of schooling for students in the middle grades that are relevant, feasible, and educationally sound in terms of curriculum, instruction, learning, and grade organization can be found in the middle school. Needed are a set of imperatives to initiate a change to the middle school concept.

We must, first, develop functional models for middle school programs and organizations which would aid planners in formulating a practice most relevant to individual communities. Second, we must re-examine the philosophical, social, and psychological bases for the education of the children in the middle school in terms of dramatic social changes so that any design for change will be compatible with

these understandings. Third, we must conduct research within the community and especially in the schools which will yeild insights into the nature of local needs which can be applied directly to local problems and to the implementation of innovative programs. Since maturation may be linked to a large extent to socio-economic conditions, relative degrees of difference in student populations will be determined by the differences in individual communities. Therefore, designs for educational change must be taken into account when determining the criteria for one community as compared to another quite different.

CONCLUSION

Many troubles of the junior high school today are due to the teen-age culture, the Carnegie Unit, the emphasis on going to college, lack of teacher preparation for dealing with junior high school problems, and a new priority for solving the social and racial ills of the community. A fresh start with planned rationale and a new title, such as what the middle school provides, might furnish the opportunity to correct these troubles. But don't be fooled, the middle school concept is not a cure all nor can it be deemed as implemented by a community just because a building is named "_____ Middle School" .

BIBLIOGRAPHY

" A Meeting of Architectural and Structural Minds", Barrington, Illinois, Public Schools, 1965.

" A New Middle School", Board of Education of Montvale, New Jersey, November, 1964, voting booklet.

Bossing and Cramer, The Junior High School, Boston, Mass., Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965.

Brewin, C.E., "Program Planning Study for the Intermediate Unit", Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Superintendent's Office, October, 1967.

Devita, Pumerantz, Wilkow, The Effective Middle School, West Nyack, N.Y., Parker Publishing Company, 1970.

Eichhorn, Donald, "Middle School: Promise of the Future", Southeast Missouri College, March, 1960.

"Features of a Functioning Middle School", N.E.A. Bulletin, Vol. 47, No. 2, May, 1969.

"Harrisburg's Middle School", Pennsylvania School Journal, p. 85-87, November, 1972.

Kindred, L., The Intermediate Schools, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc., 1968.

McGee, Jerry, "Decatur Plans a Middle School", Alabama School Journal, p. 4-5, November, 1969.

"Middle School Open-Space Orientation", Newsletter of Council of Educational Facility Planners, Vol. 6, No. 2: p. 3-5, 8, Spring, 1968.

"Middle School Plan Begins This Fall", Fort Worth, Texas, Public Schools, 1968-69.

"Middle School Shapes Education for the Seventies", Speaking of Schools, Moorestown, New Jersey, Public Schools, Vol. VIII, No. 1, February, 1970.

Pumerantz, P., "An Exploration of the Emerging Middle School Concept", Connecticut Teacher, p. 10-15, 24-25, December, 1968.

Marick, S., "Middle Schools Designed for Sprouting Years", Alburquerique Public Schools Journal, Vol. XXII, No. 6, February, 1969.

"The Middle School-An Idea Whose Time Has Come", New Jersey School Development Council,1973.

"The Pilot Intermediate Schools", Staff Bulletin, New York City Public Schools,January 8,1968.

VanZoeren, James, "Cultural Forces and the Middle School", The Administrative Quarterly,p.10-11,18,21,Spring, 1973.

"28 Ways to Build Mistakes Out of Your Middle School", The American School Board Journal,Vol.158,No.1, p.17-24,July,1970.